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PARTY WEAKNESS IN THE BALTIC COUNTRYSIDE

[Numbers in parentheses refer to appended sources]

For all practical purposes, the collectivization of the Baltic countryside has been completed. Articles in the press which deal with the Baltic countryside take collectivization for granted, referring only to the "organizational and economic strengthening" of kolkhozes, rather than to the issue of collectivization itself. In April 1951, A. Snehkus, secretary of the TsK KP(b) of Lithuania, asserted that 90 percent of the peasants of that republic had been organized in kolkhozes (1), while L. G. Kebin, secretary of the TsK KP(b) of Estonia, reported to the Sixth Congress of the KP(b) of Estonia (11 - 14 April 1951) that 92.1 percent of all farms had been collectivized (2). Delegates to that congress stated in a letter to Stalin that more than 97 percent of the entire sown area of the republic was being cultivated by kolkhozes and sovkhoses (3).

Consolidation of small and medium-sized kolkhozes -- the major event in the whole of the Soviet countryside in 1950 -- is also taken for granted now in the Baltic republics. Specific figures for the scope of consolidation in Latvia were given by A. Chernyshev, secretary of the TsK KP(b) of Latvia. Chernyshev stated that, as a result of consolidation, the number of kolkhozes in that republic had been reduced in one year (1950 - 1951) from 4,115 to 1,535 (4). According to the Neue Zuercher Zeitung, consolidation in Estonia was completed in spring 1951, and, as a result, each kolkhoz has an average of 2,000 hectares of land and comprises about 100 families (5). As of April 1951, there were 1,163 kolkhozes in the Estonian SSR (6).

Although the organizational pattern of the Baltic countryside has evidently been made to parallel that of the rest of the USSR, party dissatisfaction with conditions in the Soviet Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian countryside is apparent from numerous critical reports which have appeared in the leading organs of the press of those republics in the spring and early summer of 1951. Although such criticism of shortcomings in the political, organizational, and economic direction given by local party organizations to kolkhozes is commonplace in the Soviet press and is frequently unreliable for

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an evaluation of actual conditions, a rather sharp outline of weakness in party control over the Baltic countryside emerges from recently published reports.

The Baltic Communist parties have emphasized as two of their most urgent tasks the promotion of agriculturally trained and politically reliable people to leading posts in kolkhozes and the carrying out of intensive mass-agitation work to inculcate the kolkhoz workers with the proper socialist attitude. The shortage of rural Communists and the resistance on the part of the broad masses of the rural population to the official program in the countryside would seem to be at once the major cause of the great stress placed on these tasks and the major obstacle to their easy fulfillment.

Shortage of Rural Communists

In his report to the Eighth Plenum of the TsK KP(b) of Latvia (23 - 24 April 1951) on shortcomings in recruiting party members, Ya. E. Kalnberzin, secretary of the TsK KP(b) of Latvia, criticized local party organizations for failing to draw into the party leading kolkhoz and MTS workers and members of the rural intelligentsia. Emphasizing the need for the party to strengthen its ties with the broad masses of the population, Kalnberzin pointed out that of the more than 25,000 new members taken into the party during the past 6 years, only 18 percent were kolkhoz workers. Surveying the over-all party situation, P. P. Plesumskis, secretary of the Party Collegium under the TsK KP(b) of Latvia, "called the attention of the plenum to the fact that in many party organizations there have been instances of young Communists' losing contact with the party. This testifies to the poor selection [of people] for admission into the party and to the lack of necessary training of young Communists." (7) The general shortage of party members for work in Latvian kolkhozes specifically was indicated more recently by the fact that there were only 800 kolkhoz primary party organizations and candidate groups for the republic's 1,535 kolkhozes. (4)

In Lithuania, also, the number of primary party organizations is evidently low in relation to the number of kolkhozes. A. Snechkus stated on 17 May 1951 that "party organizations in the country are still small in number." (8) The shortage of rural Communists is implicit in Snechkus' statement in the same article that 500 Communists had been sent from the cities for work in the countryside.

The shortage of party members is probably most acute, however, in the Estonian countryside, as evidenced by the statement that there are only 82 primary party organizations and 41 party-Komsomol and candidate groups in Estonia's 1,163 kolkhozes. (6) This indicates that almost 90 percent of the Estonian kolkhozes have no primary party organizations. To remedy this situation, the Second Plenum of the TsK KP(b) of Estonia (23 June 1951) directed rayon party committees to pay "particular attention to creating kolkhoz primary organizations and party-candidate and party-Komsomol groups by sending city Communists to work in kolkhozes and by improving work on bringing into the party the best kolkhoz, MTS, and sovkhoz workers." (9) Over-all Communist party membership in the Estonian SSR has been estimated at 0.5 to 2 percent of the total population. (5)

Low party membership in the Baltic countryside has led to increased emphasis on the nonparty aktiv, Komsomols, and women for carrying out the political and economic program. A report that there are primary party organizations, party-candidate, and party-Komsomol groups in only about half of Latvia's kolkhozes pointed out at the same time that primary Komsomol organizations had been set up in 95 percent of the kolkhozes. (4) Work with women and Komsomol groups was urged upon local party organizations by the Sixth Congress of the KP(b) of Estonia. (9) Snechkus, on several occasions, indicated the reliance

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of the KP(b) of Lithuania on the nonparty aktiv and women's groups (1, 8), and A. Kvashko, secretary of the Shvencherskiy Rayon Party Committee, Lithuania, pointed out the concerted attempt of the party to use the services of the rural intelligentsia and to draw its members into the party. (10) Further evidence of the party's reliance on nonparty people may be found in the fact that in Latvia 24,000 nonparty people, as compared with 3,000 Communists, were enrolled in political schools of the party education system in the 1950 - 1951 school year. (7)

Popular Resistance to the Official Program

A major political shake-up was undertaken in Estonia in spring 1950, aimed at ridding that republic of "kulaks," "bourgeois nationalists," and other "hostile elements." (11) Repercussions of this shake-up were felt in Latvia and Lithuania. Reports in the press in the spring and early summer of 1951 indicate, however, that opposition in all three Baltic republics to the Soviet program is a continuing source of party concern.

Stechukha, has on several occasions referred to the continued presence of "kulaks" and "bourgeois nationalists" in Lithuanian kolkhozes. In May he wrote: "Extreme political vigilance is required of rural Communists. I refer to not permitting the infiltration of kolkhozes by kulaks and of getting rid once and for all of kulak and other hostile elements which have somehow insinuated themselves even into managerial positions in kolkhozes." (8; see also Source 1) The Second Plenum of the TsK KP(b) of Estonia decreed that local party and Soviet organizations must "decisively purge kolkhoz managerial staffs of kulaks and other politically unreliable elements." (9) The Eighth Plenum of the TsK KP(b) of Latvia was told that "suspicious, hostile, politically doubtful, and alien-class" elements had on occasion penetrated into the party itself. (7)

The lack of sympathy for the official kolkhoz program on the part of rank-and-file kolkhoz workers is attested to by frequent press references to their attempts to enhance their personal interests at the expense of the communal economy. The party continues to stress the need to train kolkhoz workers in the spirit of a socialist attitude toward work and on bringing them to an understanding of the "correct" union of personal and collective interests. (1, 7, 9) The lack of enthusiasm, or even the hostility, of the Baltic population toward the party may also be inferred from the low party membership and the continuing drive for more members from among the kolkhoz workers and rural intelligentsia.

Other Difficulties of Consolidation

Consolidation of kolkhozes does not seem, in its first year, to have palpably improved party control in the Baltic countryside. The reorganization of the administrative and economic operations of kolkhozes which consolidation imposes may even have added other difficulties to party work on kolkhozes. At a meeting of the party aktiv of Vil'yandiskiy Rayon, Estonian SSR, for example, the chairman of a consolidated kolkhoz told how his kolkhoz had waited in vain for direction in putting consolidation into practical effect and drawing up a new production plan for the spring sowing. The kolkhoz chairman concluded his criticism of the rayon party and Soviet organizations by saying: "But the kolkhoz workers received no help and the sowing had to be carried out in the old way -- each small artel by itself -- and the consolidation of the kolkhoz has for all practical purposes not been completed up to the present." (12) The extent to which this experience is common to other kolkhozes in the Baltic republics cannot be ascertained, but it may not be without significance that the constant references in the rest of the Soviet press to the many ways in which party work has been facilitated by consolidation are rarely encountered in the press of the Baltic republics.

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Another aspect of the consolidation movement is the determination of Latvian party and government officials to press forward the resettlement of kolkhoz workers in large, unified kolkhoz centers (agro-cities or kolkhoz settlements). After the publication in Pravda, 4 March 1951, of the detailed proposals of Khrushchev, secretary of the TsK VKP(b), for the new settlements, discussion of this topic was conspicuously dropped from the press, except for the appearance of sharp attacks against resettlement by the secretaries of the party central committees of Armenia (13) and Azerbaydzhan (14). These attacks indicated popular opposition to the plan to build two- or three-family units and to reduce the size of the individual plot allotments or to move part of these plots beyond the new settlements. The publication of these reports, together with the otherwise unbroken silence of the Soviet press on the question of resettlement, seemed to imply that the party and government had decided to suspend the resettlement movement, temporarily at least. In Latvia, however, heads of rayon Soviet executive committees, chief of rayon sections of agricultural and kolkhoz construction, construction technicians, leaders of kolkhoz construction brigades, kolkhoz chairmen, and representatives of republic ministries and institutes of the Academy of Sciences Latvian SSR attended a republic conference in June devoted to questions of construction in kolkhozes. There, the individual farmstead (khutor) system was adjudged "one of the serious obstacles to the further development of kolkhozes," and resettlement called an "important, urgent measure in the organizational and economic consolidation of kolkhozes." Discontinuation during the spring sowing season of the resettlement which many rayons in Latvia had undertaken in the winter was sharply criticized. The conference stated, however, that one of the "serious errors" committed in the past was the reduction of individual land plots by one half (15).

The emphasis on resettlement in Latvia, however, would seem to be a local phenomenon rather than another change in the official over-all party line on consolidation. The determination to continue resettlement in Latvia on an intensive scale seems like an extreme measure, motivated possibly by the conviction that only by a thorough overhaul of the Latvian countryside could party control be effectively and efficiently established.

SOURCES

- 1 Vil'nyus, Sovetskaya Litva, 25 Apr 51
- 2 Tallin, Sovetskaya Estoniya, 12 Apr 51
- 3 Ibid., 15 Apr 51
- 4 Riga, Sovetskaya Latvya, 6 Jun 51
- 5 Zurich, Neue Zuercher Zeitung, 30 Jun 51
- 6 Sovetskaya Estoniya, 18 Apr 51
- 7 Sovetskaya Latvya, 28 Apr 51
- 8 Moscow, Pravda, 17 May 51
- 9 Sovetskaya Estoniya, 24 Jun 51
- 10 Sovetskaya Litva, 21 Jun 51
- 11 Sovetskaya Estoniya, 27 Apr 50
- 12 Sovetskaya Estoniya, 9 Jun 51
- 13 Yerevan, Kommunist, 21 Mar 51
- 14 Baku, Bakinskiy Rabochiy, 26 May 51
- 15 Sovetskaya Latvya, 13 Jun 51

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